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Your Life Is Too Important...

Alternatives to riding with a drinking driver

Being a passenger with a drinking driver is risky business. It can also make you feel pretty scared and helpless. But you may have more choices in the matter than you think. The best way is to plan how you're going to get home before you even go out. If for some reason you can't do that, there are always alternatives, although they may not be easy. Play it smart. Your life is too important to just go along for the ride.

- Get a ride with a friend who isn't drinking
- Have a parent, friend or anyone who drives and cares about you pick you up
- Take a bus
- Take a taxi
- Walk
- Spend the night

"I couldn't stop him from driving!"

Trying to persuade someone who has been drinking not to drive can be like trying to talk sense to a brick wall. Because alcohol affects the brain's ability to reason, you probably won't get very far. But what if the driver is someone you care about? You'll want to try and save him from an accident. Let him know that you like him better alive. Suggest that he let someone else drive or that he take a taxi with you. Or maybe just let him stay overnight and sleep it off. But if you don't succeed, you shouldn't feel guilty or responsible. And you certainly shouldn't risk your life by going with a driver who is risking his life, and the lives of other friends.

"I can't turn down a ride from an adult-like my father or the people I babysit for!"

It's hard for most people to say no. It's particularly difficult for teenagers to say no to adults. You may be afraid of offending them, losing a babysitting job or, if it's your mother or father, getting yelled at or punished. But remember that when it comes to risking your life, you have the right to say no to anybody.

The consequences will depend on who the driver is and what the circumstances are. They will also depend on how you say no. Although the word has only two letters, saying no to someone is a bit of an art. You'll find that you don't have to be preachy or be pushy. If it's someone you don't know very well, you don't have to explain or justify what

you're doing. A simple "No thanks—I've got a ride" or "I prefer to walk" may be all you need to say.

Parents, of course, are another matter. They may have difficulty accepting what feels like judgement or criticism (don't we all?), especially from their own son or daughter. But try and discuss how you feel about the whole issue when you are not in a drinking and driving situation. In the end you may be surprised at how much most adults will respect you for your concern. Instead of losing a babysitting job, for example, you may get more work because you are so responsible.

"He wasn't drunk—he had only had a few beers. Anyway he has a really high tolerance."

Some people seem to act quite normally no matter how much they've had to drink. But that doesn't mean they can drive with the same precision as someone who hasn't been drinking. Any amount of alcohol can impair a person's driving skills—so can all kinds of drugs.

You have no way of knowing for sure if someone is impaired—not by how many drinks he has had, how he looks, or what his BAC (Blood Alcohol Concentration) is. If you have been drinking too, you are even less likely to be able to judge someone else's condition. The smart thing to do is not to drive with anyone who has been drinking at all.

"I couldn't call my parents - they'd kill me!"

If you have never talked to your parents about drinking before, you probably won't want to introduce the subject by getting them out of bed at 1:00 a.m. to pick you up at some party, especially if you have been drinking. Your parents (understandably) wouldn't like what they see and you (understandably) wouldn't like being lectured all the way home.

But don't give up on them. And don't wait until the subject is forced out into the open by a drinking and driving accident. The key is to discuss the issue before you find yourself in a tight spot. It won't be easy, but your parents may be more understanding than you think. If they realize you are trying to behave responsibly,

"My brother says he drives better when he's drunk."

Don't buy this argument from anybody. Nobody drives better when drunk. It just feels that way. At the same time that alcohol gives a false sense of confidence, it actually interferes with a person's coordination, reflexes and many other skills needed for driving well. And don't expect to sober up someone with coffee, or a cold shower, or a brisk walk. The only thing that will sober up someone is time.

bly, they may encourage and trust you to find whatever safe way home you can, even if it means waking them up or getting home a little late.

"I was too wasted to worry about anything."

It's a physical fact that anyone who has a lot to drink will have trouble making wise decisions; whether you are a driver or a passenger, alcohol impairs your judgement and reasoning. So it's all the more important to make plans and decisions ahead of time when you have your wits about you.

"My parents drink and drive all the time and they've never had an accident."

Some parents may give the impression that it's safe for them to drive when they've been drinking. And their kids tend to believe them. (After all, if you can't trust your parents, who can you trust?) Whatever your parents do seems normal and acceptable—even drinking and driving.

But parents are only human. Just because they have often done something risky without serious consequences doesn't mean it's safe. Although adults may not have as many alcohol-related accidents as teenagers, anybody who drinks and drives might as well be playing Russian roulette. The odds are that sooner or later your luck will run out.

"There was hardly any traffic on the road by the time we went home."

It may seem safer to drive when there's no traffic late at night. But half of all fatal collisions involving a drinking and driving occur between 11 p.m. and 3 a.m. And remember that there doesn't have to be even one other car on the road to have a serious accident. You may also think you're safe because you're not going a long distance. In fact, most accidents occur close to home.

"I didn't have the money for a taxi."

Taxis are expensive, especially if you take them alone. So try sharing a taxi with a few other people. It's a fast and pretty cheap way to travel, provided you're not miles from home. To make sure you can always pay for a cab, keep some money inside the front door of your home specifically for this purpose.

"I didn't want to look like a wimp and get left behind by my friends."

And who would? It's difficult to decide to go your own way when your friends are all piling into a car and saying, "C'mon, let's go!" It can feel like you have no choice, particularly if the buses have stopped running and it's too far to walk. Fortunately you always have a choice, although it may not be an easy one. First of all, you need to decide which is worse: risking being teased or risking being paralyzed for life?

The best way to deal with pressure from friends is to turn it to your advantage. Talk to your closest friends about your concern before you go out and get them to go with you by a safer means of transportation. Most people today realize that drinking and driving is foolish and very risky. If you make the decision never to ride with a drinking driver, chances are that you will be respected, not rejected—because a decision like that actually takes a lot of courage and maturity.

"If I had told him I didn't want to ride with him because he was too drunk, he would have gotten really p--ed off!"

The truth is that people can become quite hostile when they're drunk. And to avoid a fight, you may go along with them against your best judgement. But it's your life that's on the line and you have the right to protect it. Try and find friends to help you. If necessary, walk away from the situation. The next day, your friend will probably either forget or regret his angry words. A real friend wouldn't cut you off for trying to save your life and his.

"When you're with a new boyfriend, it's not cool to refuse to get in his car!"

Everyone wants to make a good impression when they first start going out. What is "cool" anyway? Some guys think it's cool to get drunk and drive like a maniac. Some girls think it's cool to go along with it. But what's cool about getting killed? Talk to your boyfriend. If he insists on drinking and driving, you may want him to be your ex-boyfriend.

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